BJ
1421
H3

UC-NRLF
$B 285 688

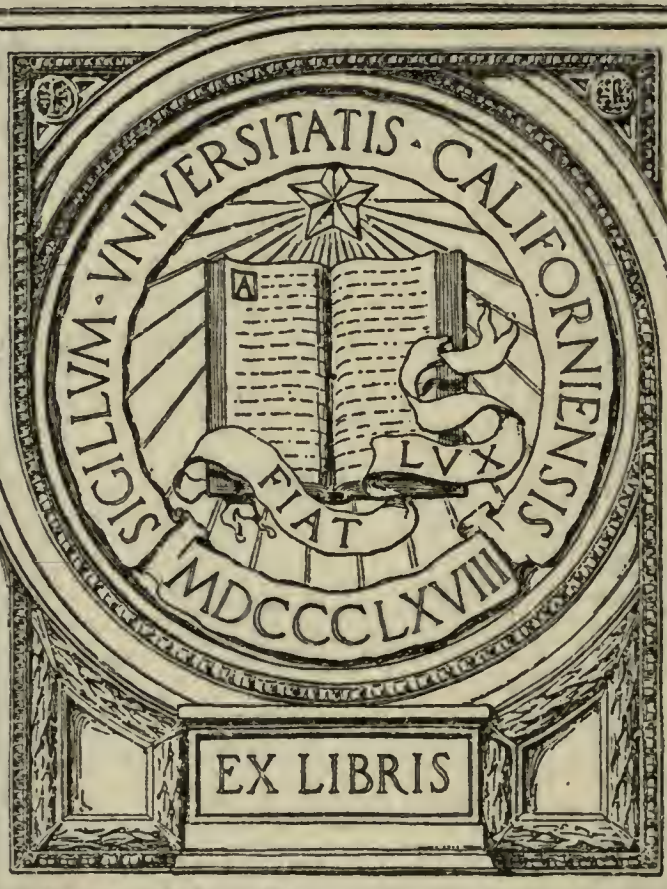
TRUTH
& CIVIC VIRTUE

Arthur Twining Hadley

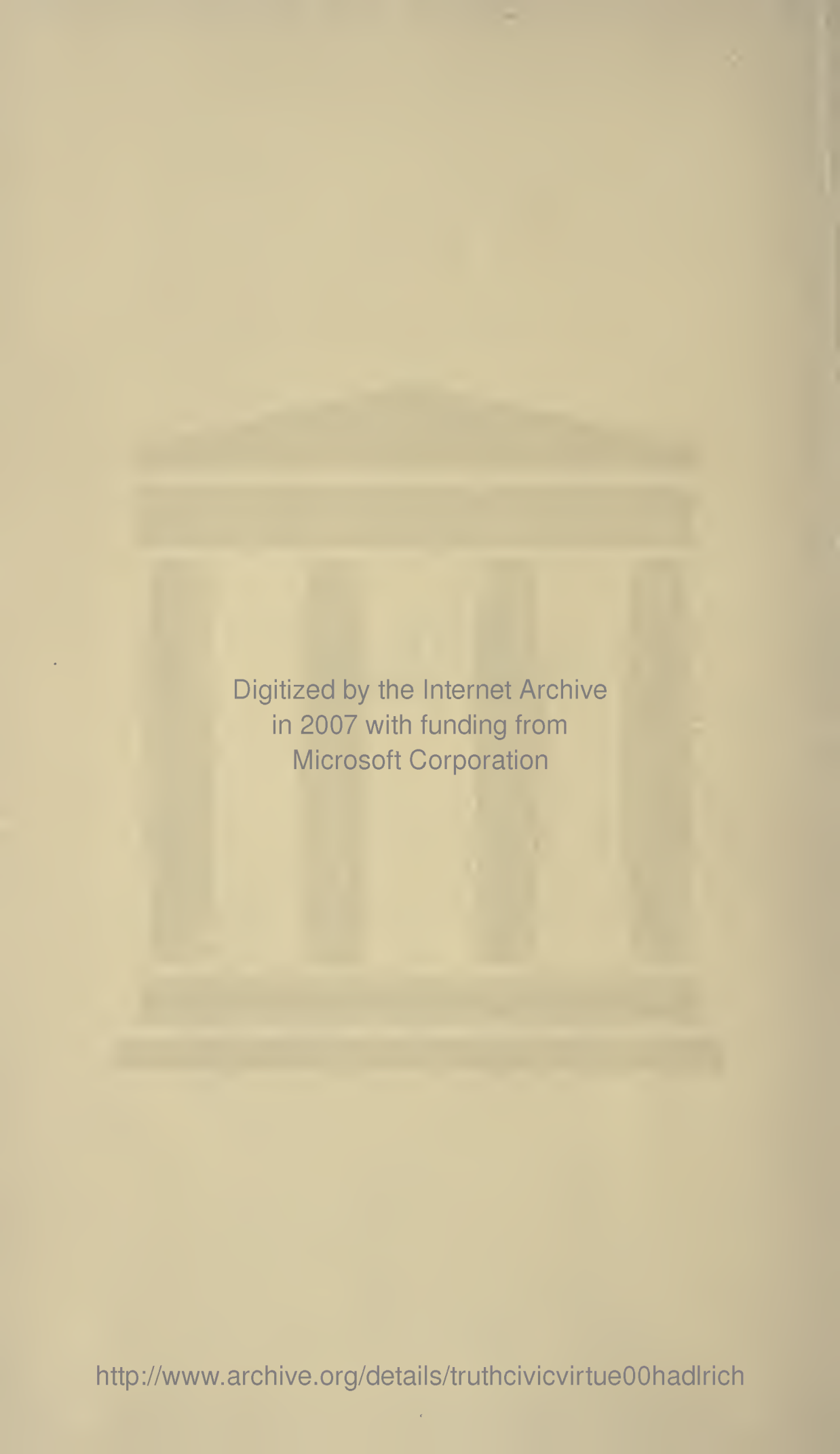
YB 22676

Hadley, A.T. Truth & civic virtue

GIFT OF
MICHAEL REESE



Truth
A Civic Virtue


Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/truthcivicvirtue00hadlrich

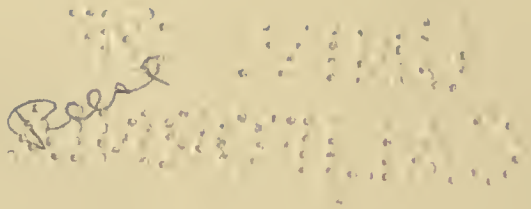
Truth
A Civic Virtue

Arthur Twining Hadley, LL.D.
President of Yale University

Matriculation Sermon
Delivered in Woolsey Hall
Yale University
Sunday, October 3rd, 1915

The Bobbs-Merrill Company
Publishers

BJ1421
H3



Truth
A Civic Virtue

Truth—A Civic Virtue

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another. Eph. 4:25.

ONE of the most interesting and instructive chapters in modern history is the upbuilding of England's Indian empire. It was the work of strong men—bold in war, able in organization, devotedly loyal to their charge. But the thing that most impressed the Indian rulers and statesmen who met and yielded to the English was not the devotion, nor the organizing power, nor even the fighting power, great as all these were; but the fact that Englishmen habitually told the truth.

Truthfulness was a quality foreign to Oriental diplomacy. In India the most accomplished statesman was he who could most successfully deceive his opponents. The straightforward announcement of a man's real intentions seemed suicidal. The keeping of promises when the end for which

they were made had been gained seemed like wilful disregard of opportunity. But as time went on the suicidal policy was justified. The apparent disregard of opportunity opened the way to new and larger opportunities. The ruler who had a treaty with the English government or a promise from an agent of the English company felt that he could rely on it. If native was allied with native each had to guard himself against treachery in the rear; if native was allied with Englishman the two could work together against a common foe. It was on this basis that English dominion in India was built up and consolidated.

Nor is this an isolated case. The keeping of treaties and promises is the one thing that enables a nation to hold its head high among other nations. A momentary success may be achieved by a policy of deceit; enduring empire belongs to the people that best knows how to keep faith. We think of the power of the Roman republic as won by force of arms. But the Carthaginians and

the Macedonians and the Gauls themselves had their full share of victories in their wars with the Romans. That which distinguished the Roman from the Gaul or the Macedonian, or even from the Carthaginian, was straightforwardness and steadiness of policy.

And what holds true of nations holds true of individuals. It may occasionally happen that a man of brilliant parts can disregard his promises with apparent success and build up an empire or a fortune on the basis of broken promises. But achievement of this kind is a precarious and transient thing, which falls to pieces when the brain that planned it begins to lose its power. It is not the man like Louis XIV or Frederick that leaves the most enduring mark on the pages of history; it is the man like Washington or William of Orange—the man who is trusted as well as admired.

This lesson has its highest importance to us here in America, who live in a democracy and who seek to succeed, not by setting our-

selves apart from other men, but by striving with them toward a common end. To make our work enduring we must work with others. To be able to work with others we must tell them the truth. Without mutual trust the cooperation of free citizens toward a common end is impossible. The whole fabric of American society rests on the assumption that we are going to be honest in our dealings. Truthfulness in word and in act, strict fulfillment of every obligation, straightforwardness in meeting all promises, expressed or implied, independent of the temporary gain or loss to ourselves, are the things that give us the right and power to be members of a free commonwealth. It is a part of our religious creed as well as of our political duty. When David described a citizen of Zion he said, "He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not."

This should be the ideal of all of us. It *is* the ideal of most of us. Yet in practise we fall lamentably short of reaching our

ideal. I want to say a few plain words about the actual reasons for this failure, and the possible means at our command for bringing our practise up to the standard.

The first thing to note is that there are three different kinds of untruthfulness, due to quite distinct causes. One man lies and cheats because he is frightened. Another lies and cheats because he expects to gain an advantage for himself or his fellows. A third lies and cheats because he sees others do it and is content to follow the fashion. We have the untruthfulness of timidity, the untruthfulness of intellectual subtlety, and the untruthfulness of perverted social instinct. The results are similar in the three cases; the origin and motives are different. We have to deal with three kinds of sin instead of one; and I am convinced that it will help us both in our thinking and in our action if we get this separation clearly made at the very outset.

The first, and probably the commonest, form of untruthfulness is due to timidity—

mental and moral panic. A man lies because he is frightened. He knows that he ought to tell the truth, and in calmer moments he intends to tell the truth; but under the influence of overpowering terror he seeks some weak evasion.

This is the kind of lying that is most universally condemned. It is unlovely in its origin; it is inefficient in its results. It is a blind and unpremeditated effort to cheat which, like other blind and unpremeditated efforts, is unsuccessful and speedily punished. But for that very reason, perhaps, it is also the kind that is least dangerous to society. It is deceit which does not deceive. It is cowardice rather than lying.

Far more effective, and for that reason more dangerous, is the second kind of untruthfulness: the evasion and misstatement due to intellectual subtlety; the deliberate fraud which a man practises in order to gain an end that appears to him desirable.

Unlike the instinctive lie of the coward, the premeditated lie of the deceiver often

appears to accomplish its purpose. A man may win a game by a trick that deceives the umpire, or a prize by a falsehood that deceives the examiner. He may gain a fortune by an advertisement that deceives the consumer, or an election by a speech that misleads the voter. Nor will the end always be a purely selfish one. Many a man will cheat in politics from motives which are largely patriotic. Some of the worst treachery in the world's whole history has been intended to promote the kingdom of God. But whether the end be selfish or unselfish, a course of deceit is a foolish way of trying to reach it. Even when fraud appears most successful, the gain from such success is usually limited and transient; while the loss which comes from forfeiture of confidence is large and permanent. The man who prides himself on his intellectual subtlety gets the thing immediately in front of him and credits that gain to his skill. He misses a dozen other things that go to the straightforward man,

and thinks himself unlucky in so doing. But what he calls ill luck is usually the indirect effect of his deceit, which he, with all his cleverness, has not been subtle enough to trace.

In point of fact, no man sees far enough into consequences to make it safe for him to enter upon a course of deceit. The greatest English whist player of his generation, James Clay, once said, "I never knew a man addicted to the use of false cards who was really successful at the whist table. In trying to deceive his adversaries, he always did more harm by deceiving his partner." If this be true in whist, where there are but fifty-two cards and only one partner, what shall be the case in the complex affairs of life, with the multitude of partners and an infinity of varying conditions!

And in the few cases where the deceiver really gains his end and wins the prize on which he has set his heart, there are other things that come with it which turn the

gain to loss. The man who has forfeited the confidence of his fellow men can no longer associate with others on a basis of mutual trust. Success gained on these terms sets a man apart from his fellows—admired, perhaps, by the multitude, but envied and hated instead of being loved and adored. Few indeed of those who say glibly that honesty is the best policy know how profoundly true this maxim proves itself, even in cases which they deem to be exceptions.

But there is a third form of untruthfulness and dishonesty which is yet more subtle and dangerous than the second: the untruthfulness and dishonesty which comes from blindly following fashions in thought and feeling which have taken possession of those about us. The temptation to this sort of untruthfulness is more subtle because a man deceives himself as well as others, and thinks that wrong things are right, or at least not very wrong, if his friends do them. It is more dangerous because the man who joins the community in accepting wrong

standards, instead of asserting independence by making right ones of his own, may find an easy road to leadership among his fellows and win their approval most when he least deserves it.

It is proverbial that a crowd will indulge in many acts of stupidity or brutality which very few individual members of the crowd would undertake by themselves. The stronger a man's social instinct is, the more he is inclined to go with the crowd and do things which he afterward sees to have been foolish or wicked. All this is commonly explained by saying that a crowd has no conscience. I think it would be truer to say that a crowd has no perceptions. An individual acting for himself keeps his eyes open. A member of a crowd has eyes for what the crowd sees and ears for what the crowd hears. If the leaders say a thing is white the crowd is hypnotized into seeing it white even if it be black as ink. The man who abandons himself to the movement of such a crowd, whether he be at the front or

at the rear, becomes possessed by a sort of mental intoxication under which he loses all sense of evidence. One man voices a suspicion; his neighbor repeats it as a charge; in a few moments it has been accepted by the crowd as a statement of fact. If each man examined the evidence for himself no man would believe it for a moment. Yet when the crowd thinks it is true every one, or almost every one, is content to accept this collective emotion in lieu of evidence; to make statements that are at variance with the facts, and to countenance or excuse dishonorable practises on flimsy and fictitious grounds.

In civilized society the impulses and emotions of the individual are seldom very dangerous. When a man feels a savage desire to kill or to steal, society defends itself by putting him in prison or into an insane asylum, according to the circumstances of the particular case. But when the whole body politic is possessed by the same emotion there is no one to repress it. The

newspapers and magazines make their profit in stimulating the mistakes which lead to savagery. Politicians find that they lose votes by trying to correct the error and gain votes by encouraging it. The blind are leaders of the blind, and both fall into the ditch.

This form of self-deceit is perilous alike to the individual and the community. The individual gets the habit of disclaiming moral responsibility. He lets his own brain and conscience go unused so often that he cannot rely on either of them as a sure defense against overmastering impulse in grave emergencies of any kind. The community is exposed to the danger that public affairs will be guided by organized emotion instead of by intelligence.

Under the influence of suspicion or emotion the public shuts its eyes to the truth until truth and falsehood become indistinguishable. From this come Sicilian vespers and massacres of St. Bartholomew. From this came the Crucifixion itself. Jesus of Nazareth was the victim of popular sus-

picion and prejudice. The most enlightened and honorable class of the community, who should have been His friends, were gradually brought into an attitude of unreasoning hostility to Him. The prejudice of the Pharisee and the prejudice of the people so interacted on one another that none could see the good in Jesus, and all joined in crying, "Crucify Him!" Such is the end of blind self-deceit.

How can we avoid these several forms of evil? Only by a rigid course of training of the brain, the emotions, and the conscience.

In the first place, we must acquire the habit of looking into evidence. We must stop buying the newspaper that tells what we wish was true, and buy the one that tries to tell what really is true. We must refuse to repeat unproved gossip or scandal merely because we like it. This will soon grow into the habit of not liking it. We shall learn to hate the unconscious lie as well as the intentional one. There may sometimes be a question whether we should

tell the truth to others who can not see it or understand it; there can be no question at all that we should tell it to ourselves. And when a man has learned to tell the truth to himself, the problem of telling it to others becomes comparatively simple.

We must so study history and science and literature as to fill our minds with ideals and aspirations that are permanently important. The man who really takes hold of the lessons of history is protected against most of the temptations to political trickery. The man who is fired with the ideals of scientific discovery or of public service is not likely to try to parade a sham science as if it were a real one. The man who has read to any purpose the classical dramas of the ancient and modern world and the great drama unfolded in the Holy Bible learns not to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage. Such men know how to see things in their right size.

We must overcome cowardice as a soldier overcomes cowardice—by discipline; by do-

ing promptly and automatically the routine duties of life that look unpleasant and dangerous, until the emotion of fear is crowded out. The self-discipline needed against cowardice is different for different men. The man who finds it hard to be punctual gains courage by following the stroke of the clock as a matter of course. The man who finds it difficult to pay his debts gains courage by paying cash. The man who is tempted to an undue dread of physical labor and pain gains courage by never shirking. The actual time or money or pain involved may be a small thing; the habit of disciplined action is an overwhelmingly large thing.

Finally, we must remember, in season and out of season, that moral responsibility is not a thing which can be delegated. Our souls are our own—to be saved by facing facts as they are, or to be lost by shutting our eyes to them. Whatever can best help us to this sense of responsibility—creed, ritual, or philosophy—will help us more than all things else to know the truth and tell it.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

Fine schedule: 25 cents on first day overdue
50 cents on fourth day overdue
One dollar on seventh day overdue

ICLF (N)

OCT 23 1947

19Mar'53LW

MAR 24 1953 LU

12Dec'56TW

REC'D LD

NOV 29 1956

8OCT'62GH

REC'D LD

SEP 20 1962

REC'D LD

DEC 14 1962

JAN 31 1998

LD 21–100m-12,'46(A2012s16)4120

U. C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES
C061339756

336820
Hoadley
BJH21
H3
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY